

British Council
Building Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA
Evidence Session
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Committee Members

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Witnesses

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Chair

I should say welcome formally. Thank you for coming and I am sorry I am so far away. This is the second formal session of the inquiry into building resilience against radicalisation and extremism. I have to say apologies for Stephen Gethins, who was going to be coming. Lord Purvis should be coming later, and Stephen Kinnock, Baroness Suttie and various other people. Thank you for coming. Abou, thank you especially to you for coming from Tunis, on Eid as well.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

It is my pleasure.

Chair

Thank you very much for that. We are very grateful and delighted to have you here. We are booked here for two hours. It may take less than two hours – that is fine – or it may take more. Who knows? I think that is unlikely. The minutes are taken the whole way through and will be produced on the website and will be part of the report that we eventually write about the best ways that we should tackle extremism. Everything you say is going to be taken down and used in evidence against you. We are very lucky to have the four of you here, so thank you for that.

We are going to perhaps introduce each of you. I will do that and then you all each are going to say a few things, which will be very useful to us. Then we have four topics of questions that it would be nice to go through. One is an introduction really – how work that you do is organised and structured so that it has the most meaningful impact. Secondly, what is the on-the-ground perspective or what are the local challenges that you face and how do you win trust and so on? Thirdly, how do organisations locally respond to that? What works and what does not work? What have you discovered and what could we learn? Fourthly, how can we increase the impact, so the scale of the things that do work, the successes?

We will start with Rebecca. I shall say a little bit about you because it goes on the record. You are head of Programmes for the Middle East and North Africa for International Alert and you oversee work in Tunisia, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey, aiming to identify and understand the drivers of vulnerability to violence and extremism, particularly among young people, and tackling those issues through education and through governance projects. I know you have also worked closely with the British Council Syria team on active citizenship projects with young people and on social cohesion between refugee and host communities – quite interesting. Over to you.

Rebecca Crozier

I should say International Alert is a peacebuilding organisation. We have been around for about 30 years and we work in countries affected by conflict. We are not organisation that is set up specifically to deal with violent extremism. However, given the context in which we work, extremism, though not a new issue, over the past few years has become an increasing issue on our agenda, both from the donor governments that fund us, like the UK, but also from the governments of the countries in which we are working, like Tunisia for example. In that sense, we are a bit like the British Council. We are working in a context where it is an issue. We are in the process of working out what we have at our disposal in order to address violent extremism. Our hypothesis is that the peacebuilding has a number of tools that we bring that can address some of the issues that drive violent extremism.

Just to start off with – in the questions we can into more detail as to what exactly we are doing – I wanted to give you based on our learning so far as an organisation three key messages about working to tackle the drivers of violent extremism. The first one is to get comfortable with complexity and that is really important. I was here last week when you spoke to the academics. I was sitting in the back listening, trying to work out how it all works. One thing that was very clear from them was that there are a number of different drivers of violent extremism and they are very context-dependant. Our own research shows that as well. For example, in Syria we looked at why young people join violent extremist groups. For example, for young Syrians inside Syria livelihood is a major issue. They are desperate. They have no other income and armed groups offer a weekly or monthly stipend. That in some ways can be enough to attract a young person to an armed group inside Syria.

If you talk to young Syrians in refugee communities in Lebanon or Turkey there is an economic cost to them going and travelling to Syria, so the livelihood issue is not the driver. It is more to do with things like your sense of respect, sense of belonging, self-esteem that you do not get from being a refugee. You get the opposite and armed groups offer that sense of belonging. What drives somebody to join an extremist group can be extremely context specific. Therefore, when you are talking about building resilience or responding to violent extremism there is no blueprint. There is no single solution. Getting comfortable with that complexity I think would be the first thing we would say as an organisation and the first thing that we have learnt.

The second relates to the language. I know that the academics as well have – they were saying that they have debated this for 10 years and not come to any agreement as to what the term ‘violent extremism’ means. You can spend a long time talking about it. It is important that we talk about it because what you and I understand by violent extremism could be very different to what a Syrian person or a Tunisian person understands by violent extremism. It is important that we have that conversation about what we really mean. At the end of the day, we would agree with the academics you spoke to last week. Violent extremism is a symptom. It is not a driver.

Say-what-you-see is the bumper sticker. It is understanding what the drivers are to violent extremism and naming those. For example, in Tunisia we have been working with young people in

a couple of particularly marginalised suburbs of Tunis. When we spoke to those young people the major issue that they face is political marginalisation. They do not feel that they have a political voice, that the revolution has forgotten them. They were on the front lines of getting rid of Ben Ali but have not experienced any kind of dividend since then. That is a major issue for them and something that is pushing them into the arms of groups that offer a political voice. The question there is not how do we stop young people joining violent extremist groups; it is how do we give people the opportunity to become political active in a way that is constructive and non-violent. That is say-what-you-see – naming the drivers and not focusing too much on the symptoms.

Then the third area, which is where hopefully this group here will be slightly more optimistic than the academic sector, is that we would argue that there are things that we can do to make a difference. Whilst I know a lot of the conversation last week was very much about global economic inequality as a major driver for extremism and the need to address that – and that is important and essential and we should be aiming towards that – at the same time there are things that we can do right now on the ground to address some of the things that drive people to extremism. During the questions I can talk in a bit more detail to what we have done exactly, but the main learning that we have is first and foremost the need to understand local perspectives and needing to understand what drives extremism in that particular context and then respond to those.

I was speaking about Tunisia and what we did in Tunisia was not go into those suburbs and say, ‘What do you think about violent extremism?’, but we actually trained young people themselves as enumerators to do the research because they have the trust of the local community more than an outsider coming in and they spoke to their peers. They spoke about things like, ‘What are your hopes for the future?’ ‘What do you want to be when you are older?’ ‘What is your opinion of the political situation in Tunisia at the moment?’ ‘Who do you go to for religious guidance?’ ‘Who do you go to for career advice?’ and, ‘What is your experience of the education system?’ Through that you get to understand that person as a whole and you get to understand some of the issues within that society that drive people to violence, not just extremism but things like getting on a boat and coming to Europe. They are all interlinked.

The second is that local interventions do work. For organisations like us, like all the people sat at this table and for the British Council, partnerships with people on the ground are essential. We work in Syria. We do peace education programmes where we integrate peacebuilding values into the education curricula that we are already providing – how to solve conflicts without violence, how to critically analyse the world around you and that kind of thing. We work with a network of partners and they have partners. What is actually being delivered on the ground is by a very, very local, micro-level organisations that only maybe exists in that village because that is where they have trust. That is the really important thing about working with local organisations is the trust that they have. You could never in 20 or 30 years as an international organisation build that level of trust, so they are indispensable to your work.

The other thing that we can do to make a difference and what we need to bear in mind is targeting. Again, last week there was discussion about the potential stigmatisation. There is no one demographic that is susceptible to extremism. There is no one profile that you can say, ‘Okay. This person is at risk’. There is a danger in trying to identify those at-risk populations or individuals. There is a danger that you stigmatise them and by saying, ‘You are vulnerable to extremism’, you actually make them more vulnerable. Having a broader target group – for example, the work that we do in Syria is with people who are in formal or informal education. They are there already – with the option to then narrow down. If your teacher identifies a particular student that is at risk they have the opportunity to work more closely with that person.

Then just the final point that I wanted to make was that though the issue of violent extremism is not new we are still building the evidence base of what works in addressing violent extremism. Any intervention needs to really invest in that and invest in understanding what the impact is of what you are doing, so that we build the evidence base because we know that these peacebuilding interventions work – and, again, we will talk about it in response to the questions – but we need to continually build that evidence base so that we can increase the investment from governments in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and long-term solutions that go side-by-side with the more security, military interventions. We are not saying do not do that and only do peacebuilding, but at the moment if you look at the investment in military solutions or defence or security-based solutions versus the more long-term there is no comparison, really. Building that evidence base is really crucial. Those were the three main points that I wanted to make. I am happy to go into more detail of exactly what it is that we are doing in the Q&A.

Chair

Thank you very much for that. That is brilliant. We will come back in the Q&A. We will move on to Abou. Thanks again for coming from Tunis today. Abou Fassi-Fihri is Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Search for Common Ground. He has 12 years of experience with NGOs and multinational agencies, including the World Bank and the European Commission. You were a former board member of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office and you began working for the Search for Common Ground office more than 12 years ago and handled their European office. You designed and managed conflict prevention and institution-building programmes around mediation, alternative dispute resolution, youth and media, interestingly, and much else. Over to you, Abou.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

Thank you very much, Chairman and Baroness. I would like to begin by thanking you for convening this timely and important inquiry and launching a forum to investigate how better to build resilience of communities at risk of radicalisation. My name is Abou Fassi-Fihri. I am the Middle East and North Africa Director at Search for Common Ground, which is the world leader organisation in international peacebuilding. Since 1982 we have operated programmes in 35 countries across Asia, Africa and the Middle East and we partner with governments, civil society and media and the private sector to strengthen society's capacity to transform conflict. In the MENA region specifically, we have worked in 10 countries on a variety of issues, ranging from social cohesion, security sector reform, youth and women participation in government and preventing and countering violent extremism. We do not only work on preventing and countering violent extremism, but we work on a diversity of other sectors and issues across the region.

Regarding our topic today, I will provide a brief overview of our approach to countering violent extremism, which has four pillars, and then I will propose three recommendations based on what we have seen in our work. The four pillars for Search on CVE (countering violent extremism) are prevention, disengagement, enabling state response and amplifying alternative narratives.

On the first pillar, prevention, we empower vulnerable communities to use non-violent means to address their grievances and to self-realise. For instance, in Tunisia through dialogue we engage with community leaders, women and youth, religious leaders and local authorities to collaboratively identify localised push and pull drivers to violent radicalisation, as well as advance collaborative local response in each community where we work.

So far in six communities we have engaged 667 people in these dialogues and the research has shown that drivers are localised and they differ from one community to the other. For instance, one

community may suffer from strong sentiment of historical injustice and isolation from the central decision making power. In another community we would find that the grievances might be primarily about the deficient education system. In a third one, it might be that it is the deep distrust with the local police. Each community response must be different from one community to the other and must always be community-led.

On our second pillar, disengagement, we support people currently or previously engaged in or at risk of radicalisation to choose alternative non-violent pathways. This work is mostly conducted within the prison system and in support to national authorities. In Morocco, we partner with the Moroccan prison administration and The Mohammed VI Foundation for the Reintegration of ex-Prisoners, Rabita Mohammadia of Islamic Scholars, and the National Centre for Human Rights to train prison management, the guards, as well as detainees, in a diversity of techniques to better manage conflict, enhance self-esteem of detainees and tackle the issues of the community's reception of ex-prisoners, so as to decrease recidivism and lessen the appeal of recruitment into violent extremist groups.

In our third pillar, we assist governments to work collaboratively with non-state actors to expand the portfolio of policy options available to them, so beyond the use of adversarial approaches or kinetic force. This includes initiatives such as supporting collaborative relationships in Indonesia between anti-terrorism policy units and human rights groups as they develop human rights principles, devise complaints mechanisms and strengthen communication with communities.

I should note that this work does not come yet very naturally. For instance, one recent research we engaged with in Jordan showed that if and when families are suspicious that their child is becoming radicalised, only 7% of them would turn to state agencies for local support, while 46% of them will turn to trusted religious leaders and it is therefore essential for religious leaders to be well equipped to approach these complex issues. As such, we have worked closely with the Rabita Mohammadia of Islamic Scholars Morocco to contextualise the community mediation curriculum and train hundreds of Moroccan imams. This work is also currently piloted in Western Europe.

Finally, in our fourth pillar to countering violent extremism, we seek to amplify credible and constructive narratives to reduce the appeal of violence as an option. We work with local writers and producers to create television, radio series and comic books that tackle issues of identity and promote principles of societal collaboration and inclusion. Participation in violence is often driven by emotional experience, not only rational calculation. Media programmes like drama series and TV reality shows can foster empathy and influence social norms by connecting with audiences' emotional needs and aspirations. These are our four pillars on CVE.

I will now present three short recommendations based on what we have seen in our work.

The first one is about the current policy framework on CVE, which is heavily framed on the counter-radicalisation and counter-extremism space and it is damaging in terms of the impact it has on programme goal-setting because of its negative narrative. For instance, is the highest goal for youth that they avoid becoming radical and violent? We have seen strategies that stigmatise youth by treating them as potential weapons of mass destruction, but instead youth must be drivers of social change who can channel their positive aspirations through constructive non-violent activism. The policy framework has to change. We recommend leveraging the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security, which provides a more positive framework through which governments can provide greater resources and space for youth to positively mobilise for peacebuilding within and across communities.

The second recommendation is that in our experience the best approach entails a whole-society approach, involving all stakeholders, state and non-state in the design and implementation of

interventions and programming. This of course requires deliberate trust and relationship building between and within communities and across state-citizen relationships, which may be non-existent or tense. Working to broaden the number of actors involved in addressing the risk of violent extremism can build confidence, create channels of communication and lead to better security and governance outcomes. It can also create a civic space that is less susceptible to the message of violent extremism.

The last recommendation is to right-size the role of religion on these issues. Rather than focusing on theology, government and civil society partners should work with credible religious voices, cognisant of their important social roles. Examples include training religious leaders to deal with violent extremism and creating opportunities for them to interact with government and other actors of society. In summary, engage with them on the basis of their constituencies, not theology.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my experience in these opening remarks. Thank you.

Chair

Thank you very much. That was fascinating. Thank you. We will come back to questions, but we will move over to Andras. Andras is Peace and Conflict Advisor for Mercy Corps and you have been working on peacebuilding issues in the Arab world since 2010, recently managing their Lebanon programmes and previously working with local organisations in Lebanon and Egypt, implementing inter-religious reconciliation, community arbitration and mediation, and youth governance programmes.

Andras Beszterczey

Thank you very much for inviting Mercy Corps to support our peer NGOs with providing this committee with information on our findings on addressing violent extremism and political violence. Mercy Corps, similar to International Alert and Search for Common Ground, works on addressing violence. Our work on violent extremism originates from working on political violence since the late 1990s. We have implemented over 100 peacebuilding programmes around the world. We are currently working in nine countries in the Middle East and North Africa region.

One thing that is slightly different about Mercy Corps is that we are a broad mandate organisation, which means we do everything from immediate humanitarian relief programmes all the way to development programmes on education, peacebuilding and now violent extremism. For us, this work on political violence and extremism falls within a broader portfolio of programmes and I will just discuss a little bit later about how we utilise one to build on the other.

Over the next brief few minutes I wanted to talk about three different things. First of all, what we are finding are the things that reduce political violence. Secondly, some common programming mistakes that many implementing organisations still make. It is part of the reason that we are still not as successful in our programmes addressing violent extremism as we could be. Third, I will provide three examples from Mercy Corps' programmes – two from the Middle East and North Africa region and one from Nigeria.

Regarding what reduces political violence, we see four broad areas. The first and foremost is reducing state abuse. A lot of the findings coming out of Mercy Corps and our peer agencies are that it is exposure to violence, particularly from government security forces, that is one of the leading predictors of people using violence. This opens up a large room for action in security sector reform programming – working with the police, militaries and working in the justice sector especially. We know that prisons are a huge venue for the recruitment of individuals into violent extremist organisations and this is actually a key policy recommendation we have for the UK

government around the development of the national action plans for countering violent extremism by UN member states. There is a real fear from Mercy Corps and other NGOs that these national action plans can legitimise state abuse against vulnerable populations.

Secondly, we are promoting positive state-citizen relationships, again, going back to this idea that it is often government abuse that results in people using political violence in general and violent extremism in particular. In Iraq, we have some research programmes that show that if you perceive the state as responsive to your needs your support for armed opposition groups decreases. We specifically did this survey with the Sunnis to see how their support for ISIS can vary. We see that if we work with state and civil society to bridge those relationships and stem the type of social, political and economic marginalisation that is leading Sunni youth to join ISIS we can actually address violent extremism.

Thirdly, we use the same actual terminology that Search for Common Ground use in this whole of society approach. To address these complex problems you need to work with a range of individuals, with a range of actors – private sector, government. We are doing that in Jordan. I will discuss that towards the second half of my presentation.

Fourth is the idea that we need to invest in peacebuilding earlier. We need a layered and sequenced programme that integrates relief, recovery and development components. For example, in our humanitarian work we implement through local partners in Iraq to ensure that we can begin to build the relationships between communities and between communities and the state that our peacebuilding programmes can capitalise on later.

On the idea that many of our programmes are still not hitting the mark, there are still a lot of mistakes made with programming. I think this comes from two different areas. One is about the exacerbating of frustrations. Many of the youth that our political violence and violent extremism programmes target are socially, economically and politically marginalised, which is one of the leading reasons why they support violence. Often our programmes can exacerbate these frustrations and these happen across the board.

For example, we have vocational training programmes that provide youth with the skills for them to access jobs, but they do not actually work on the local labour market to increase the demand for these jobs. A lot of this vocational training is mechanics or hairdressers, but in a certain area you can only have a certain amount of mechanics and hairdressers. If you imagine these youth who have undertaken this three, four month training programme and then they still do not have a job at the end of it. I think a lot of these programmes focus on these immediate, ‘We need to train so-many youth’, without actually thinking what are the larger systems we are feeding into and what are these frustrations.

Similarly, with civic education and governance programmes, programmes that teach youth to advocate for their needs but do not actually work with the government to ensure the government is responsive to hearing youth’s voice because the government do not see its importance. Again, it is an idea that you increase the supply but not the demand, whether it is vocational training or civil engagement. We have found that in Somalia, youth who were more civically engaged were more likely to use violence precisely for this reason because they do not see that they have viable alternatives for peaceful change.

Secondly is the problem of profiling. Rebecca mentioned this. We do not see a demographic profile in terms of socioeconomic status, whether you are educated or your family background. None of these things are consistent across the board. When you try to profile youth you actually exacerbate their feelings of injustice because you are coming in and you are saying, ‘You guys are

the ones who are at risk of radicalisation'. You are reinforcing this identity that they are the ones that are being picked on.

I think that rather than trying to profile based on demographics we should recognise the patterns that we see. We know that there are more violent extremists coming from certain geographic locations than others. For example, more come from the Middle East and North Africa than from Western countries. Within the Middle-East and North Africa there are certain countries and certain localities in these countries where there are more violent extremists. These are normally the ones where those drivers of violent extremism are the most pressing. They are areas that are abused or neglected by the state more than others. When we try to ensure our programmes are reaching the people most at prone of using political violence, we target based on these things and not profile them as individuals.

Thirdly, I will quickly discuss some of the concepts behind Mercy Corps' programmes. Broadly, as a whole, we try to work on building community resilience to violent extremism. We do this by ensuring that communities are able to address their grievances among each other or against the state so that violent extremist organisations are not able to go in to exploit and manipulate these grievances. We find that this broad, community based approach is more effective than youth-focused models because with youth-focused models you naturally get into the problems of targeting or profiling that I just discussed. In Iraq, I mentioned that Sunni youth who see the state as responsive are less likely to support armed opposition groups. We work to bring the communities and the government together to implement projects together that serve the community's needs. That can be around access to water, sanitation, education or electricity. All of these day-to-day amenities can be grievances in these situations, or the necessary things for the longer term development of the youth, including education and access to meaningful employment.

Secondly is Jordan. I mentioned this whole of society approach, which requires working at multiple levels of the system with multiple actors. You have to work with individuals. You have to provide them with psycho-social support. You have to have awareness-raising with their families. In doing so you have to begin addressing issues that you might think are unrelated to violent extremism. For example, domestic violence can legitimise the use of violence in the eyes of children and youth, which becomes a contributing factor to their use of violence later.

Then you have to work at the community, society and state levels to address the economic, social and political marginalisation of youth. We did a study last year on why Jordanians joined ISIS and we found three broad findings. One is the narrative around Sunni suffering that ISIS is the great defender of in their narrative. Secondly, is hopelessness about the future. Thirdly, there are the social networks that can entice youth to join ISIS or convince them to stay or return if they already joined.

To address these three key drivers you have to work with multiple actors. To address the narrative of Sunni suffering you have to help communities to articulate their own counter-narratives against ISIS. To address youth's hopelessness for the future you have to work with the communities so that they provide youth with a stake in the community's development so youth recognise their role. You also have to work with the private sector so that youth have access to meaningful employment. Then around social networks, you have to strengthen the social systems that have a more positive role in reducing youths' likelihood of joining ISIS or using violence in general. Thank you very much.

Chair

Thank you, Andras. Thank you very much. Pretty top stuff. Lastly, is Miranda. Miranda is Policy and Advocacy Advisor at Mercy Corps, leading work on youth and violence and advising on issues

of forced displacement. She was recently with the International Organization for Migration in Jordan and Yemen and has also worked with Saferworld, Quaker United Nations Office and the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute.

Miranda Hurst

Thank you very much for introducing me, but there is a misunderstanding, which is that Andras has delivered my messages also. I am here to contribute in the Q&A.

Chair

Oh, lovely. Then we are done. That is brilliant. That is lovely. Then we can move on to questions, which are in four areas: how [inaudible] strategise, the ground perspective, how organisations respond and how to create or increase the impact of successes. I was saying earlier, other people are going to be coming in and out apparently. I know you have to go soon. Do you have a Committee?

Baroness Suttie

I have my EU Select Committee. We are doing Brexit and David Davis is coming.

Chair

It is all going on. I apologise again for being so far away, particularly as there is only two of us, but there we are. Did you want to start?

Questions and Answers

Baroness Suttie

I would like to start with a question that is not done by topic if that is alright.

Chair

Absolutely.

Baroness Suttie

I have been working in Jordan for the last 15 months, so I have a particular interest in the programmes you are describing in Jordan. I understand, because you, Abou and Andras, have explained quite clearly, the concept behind them. What I would like to understand a little more and in more detail is how they work in practice. Give an example of how you do this whole community approach. You were talking about the need to bring communities, private sector individuals and religious communities together and have a holistic approach to it. How does that work in practice? How do you choose the people? How do you actually do the fieldwork? How does it work? If you could just give us a specific example that would be really helpful.

Andras Beszterczey

There are a few different questions there. In terms of how do we work with all of these different composite components of society, I guess that is very case-by-case, depending on the component of the programme. This is why these programmes are quite hard to understand because they are very complex. In terms of private sector, we appeal to their financial self-interest in terms of –

Baroness Suttie

Sorry, what I mean is can you give me an example of a specific programme and how it is working and what is actually done?

Andras Beszterczey

Absolutely. That reference to Jordan at the end of my presentation about the study and the parts of the programme is what we do in these situations. We normally do a study of what the drivers are of youth political violence and violent extremism and then we address each point in turn. When youth say it is about hopelessness for the future that is why we have the economic aspect, the livelihoods and vocational training. For that we work with the private sector.

Then we have about youth not feeling that they have a vested interest in their community. Then we go to local community leaders. That can be tribal elders, that can be religious leaders and we say, 'Look, there is this problem of the youth not feeling engaged in their community'. Of course, these are intelligent people. They recognise this. Then we say, 'Look, we want to work with you to help to work with the youth'. 'We have x amount of millions of pounds from the British government or euros or dollars. We want to work on community development projects'. Then we bring youth together and we bring the religious leaders together and we get them to discuss what the issues are that they see in their communities.

We normally try to address a whole range of different issues. Some of these can be very practical – access to social services and access to recreational space. For example, religious leaders say that – this was in Jordan – youth are abusing drugs like Captagon and other drugs because they have nothing to do and the youth are saying, 'We need space to enjoy ourselves on the weekend. We need space to hang out'. We might build a football pitch or some project I saw a couple of days was rehabilitating a school theatre, so the youth actually have a space to go and put on plays. You have these infrastructure projects around access to social services and then you have the softer side that brings together youth and helps them to build the relationships among themselves and with key leaders in their communities for the future. Does that answer your question?

Baroness Suttie

It does partially. What I was actually looking for was could you give me a very specific example of a project on the ground in Jordan.

Rebecca Crozier

Can I give you an example of a project from Tunisia? I have a visual aid because I found it difficult to talk about this without having given you a picture. I mentioned about the suburbs of Tunis that we work in, where we have done the research that showed that young people's main concern is political marginalisation. What we did with those young people that helped us to do the research we set up – this an open street map. This is a map of that suburb. What we did with the young people was that we gave them the devices to map their area. If you look outside of the red line that is what the map would originally look like. Inside of the red line is what all the young people have done. They have mapped the little alleyways. They have mapped the mosques. They have mapped schools. They have mapped recreational areas.

What that enabled them to do was to go to the local authorities. What we needed to do was build that relationship between the citizen and the state that did not exist before. The only relationship that was there was the security forces and it was a very confrontational relationship. They used this map to be able to go to the local authority and say, 'Look, we have mapped this area'. The local authority did not actually have a map. They had one dated 1999 that was only available in paper.

They are going to the local authority with something that is useful to the local authority and to be able to say, ‘Look, this is our area. This is what we have identified as certain problems, so areas where there are no recreational facilities, areas where there is a problem with garbage collection or there is no street lighting’. It gave them an equal platform to talk to the local authority. The local authority gradually then started to engage these young people when they were having meetings, so inviting them along to advise on things.

The next step that we pushed for is – the local authority has a £600,000 budget for development per year of that local authority. They actually agreed that they would allow us to take half of that budget and go through a participatory budgeting process with the wider community led by these young people in order to understand how that €300,000 was going to be spent. The young people did that. They facilitated discussions with women’s groups, with their elders in mosques and at schools about what the issues were in the local community and how this money should be used. They came up with things like beautification schemes. Part of the problem in that suburb is it is heavily stigmatised as being a bit of a ghetto or a no-go area – dirty, lack of recreational facilities. So mending street lights – very, very small, simple things, but what it has done is mended that or helped build that bridge.

What we can do with this as we go forward as we are building the trust is use this map, for example, to start to map areas where young people are particularly targeted by security forces and where there are instances of sexual violence. The next step is to start to build that conversation between young people and the security forces, for example, which is a much more contentious issue and we need to have much more trust to get to that stage. That is where we are on the process.

We know that it is working because we know some of the young people that are involved and we are measuring their perceptions towards local authorities and perceptions towards the Tunisian government. We know that those are changing. There are particular individuals that are involved who perhaps got involved somewhat reluctantly through a sister or a cousin, who were according to their families a bit on the edge. They could have gone one way or they could have gone another, not necessarily that they were going to go and join ISIS. Nobody would admit to that. They are now more constructively engaged in mapping their local community. This has given them a purpose and a sense of belonging to something bigger.

Baroness Suttie

That is great. That is exactly what I was after. Thank you very much. Thank you. Obviously you are London-based, Andras, so you would not necessarily know all the details of all the projects on the ground. I know the theory. I just wanted to hear a specific practical example.

Chair

Yes. It was exactly what I was going to ask as well.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

Maybe I can comment on that as well. On Jordan, Search for Common Ground has co-produced research with UN Women in Jordan and with a local research centre, Al-Hayat Center. We supported that research on the gender dimensions of radicalisation in Jordan. We have not engaged in Jordan yet on practical programming on preventing violent extremism, but rather on learning. The role of women is very important at different levels. In fact, they may participate or may radicalise for the same reasons that men do. There is this assumption across the Middle East and North Africa that women who go to jihad or join ISIS do that for the “jihad nikah”, meaning that they do so just to be the bride of the male fighters. We have seen that there are in fact so many

other reasons including the same reasons as men and that is very interesting. Women can also be champions for prevention, as men are, and perhaps even more. The role of mothers is very important in the family also. I encourage you to read the findings of the research published by UNWomen in Jordan, which is available online.

In Tunisia I can give you a very concrete example. People experience the effect of extremism because it is real in their communities. I want to say that the primary affected people are the Tunisian people because radicalization occurs in their family, neighbours, university, etc. We have done many focus groups and one day we had 24 youths coming from the 24 governorates of Tunisia together in one room. We asked them the question, 'Raise your hand if you know directly or indirectly someone who went to join ISIS'. 25% of the youth there in that room raised their hands. The phenomenon is very deep and people want to engage and do something about it. I think it is a very important part because often we may feel that and maybe public opinion may feel that people do not feel concerned. But communities across the region are primarily concerned because everyone wants to experience and live a peaceful life in the community.

What we have done at Search for Common Ground is to bring together the local authorities with the religious leaders, the youth, women and civil society to say, 'In my community, what are the problems and what are drivers?' As I said before, these drivers are different from one place to another. That is amazing because five years ago of course in Tunisia, such an inclusive civil society-government process like this would never happen given the trust deficit between citizens and government under the previous regime. Today these collaborative mechanisms are possible and people are embracing them, both the government (which is engaging), and civil society.

Chair

Thanks. Andras, actually you said something similar which threw up a similar question in my mind. You talked about community resilience and you said that you have to work with individuals sometimes in terms of their psychology. I was wondering how exactly that works. In what way would you work with an individual in order to address something that is internal and that is in their mind, which might be the feelings of alienation or isolation or having no control over the environment or whatever it is? How do you turn that around within themselves?

Andras Beszterczey

What I mentioned was there is a type of programme. It is called psycho-social support. It basically teaches youth a range of soft skills, things like non-violent communication, so that they are more able to deal with daily stresses of life. I think we are doing some research in Jordan around this.

Miranda Hurst

The research is about how self-reported stress levels reflect cortisol levels. It is not currently linked to a programme as such, so is probably not a concrete example you are looking for. We will eventually be looking at whether these sorts of psycho-social programmes impact cortisol levels. The thinking at the moment is that extreme shocks and prolonged exposure to violence or stress changes adolescent brain chemistry. I think the science is that stress impairs your prefrontal cortex so you are more likely to take risks. Your behaviour is a bit more erratic and unpredictable. We are looking to the scientific community, to what can be learned, and then how it could be useful to our programmes. We are not quite there yet. We have to wait for the research findings.

Andras Beszterczey

The foundation of this psycho-social support is making sure that youth are less able to be exploited by people coming in and playing upon their stresses and grievances. It is about how they can manage their own emotions and what Miranda was saying. It is our way to show that these programmes actually work and making sure that we are plugged into the academic community, especially neuroscientists, who can give us the data to show that these work.

Rebecca Crozier

Could I just add on to that to answer that question as well? One thing that we have done, particularly with young Syrians inside Syria and in refugee communities as well, is that we have a programme that is on education. I might have said it in my introduction, but it basically integrates peacebuilding methodologies until education curriculums. It is not just one, two, three, a, b, c, but it is also the more holistic education, so how do you learn to question the world around you and how do you agree to disagree or non-violent communication?

Part of that is also working with organisations that are providing education anyway, either formal education through schools or informal education through youth centres, and supporting to embed within the school or the youth centre essentially a qualified counsellor, so somebody who can work with children who have been traumatised to talk through and help them to deal with some of the issues that they face, whether it is missing a sense of belonging or having a sense of revenge that might drive them to want to join an extremist group to avenge the death of a family member. I think that is quite important because I think in my introduction – a lot of us have said – we have all said we are working broad in a community-focused approach rather than an individual approach.

It is important to have that space to work with particular individuals as and when they come up through programmes that you are doing anyway. The teacher might through an education programme be able to identify particularly traumatised individuals. We have had experiences of where children have come to their mentors or facilitators in an education programme and said, ‘My cousin is fighting for ISIS. He has asked me to go and join. I am quite tempted to do that. What do you think?’ Being able to talk it through with a trusted mentor on an individual level has been able to then change their minds. Working at the broad structural level with the whole of community but with the flexibility to be able to work with individuals as well – it is that kind of balanced approach.

Chair

Thank you. Rebecca, you said also that in order to address trust, which was the second part of the question that we were going to ask, you used local people and local organisations, as you have just said. How do you get those local people and those organisations to trust that working with you is a good plan? At some point someone has to trust you. How does that work?

Rebecca Crozier

Good question. For example, in Tunisia, as in lots of places, we employ local staff – i.e. Tunisians, not necessarily foreigners. It is a small thing but it is important, nonetheless. A lot of work goes into things like OpenStreetMap. There was a year of research before that. That research phase involved a serious inception phase to start to identify who holds the keys in that particular community and who we need to get on board. At the end of the day, it is a lot of face-to-face relationship-building: staff going into those communities, meeting people again and again, informally for coffee and things like that.

I am telling you this because it is important. It is hard to explain to somebody who is paying for the project, who has to explain to a taxpayer who is paying for the project, why it takes such a long time to do these things. Particularly on this issue of violent extremism, it is essential to do that trust-building part of it. For example, we looked at the lawyers association that was representing people who were aligned with hard-line Salafist groups in Tunisia. That was an entry point. That was a group that we built a relationship of trust with by knocking on their door.

Particularly for the British Council, we, like the other organisations here, probably, identify ourselves as international. We are British-based and probably a quarter of our funding comes from the UK government, with the rest coming from other governments. We can, then, say that we are not aligned to any one particular government; we are international. That is the first thing that people ask you: 'Where is the money coming from to do this? Is it American money?' They want to know that. If it is American money, they think that you are working for the CIA. It is really that kind of thing that you need to be quite careful of. That is quite important for the British Council because they are, in their identity, British. You cannot get away from that. They have a lot of credence and their reputation opens a lot of doors for them, but that is just something to bear in mind as to how they work and what they do. I am sure they are very aware of that as well.

There are lots of different things: who you hire and who is funding you. You have to be open about who is funding you, so you need to be careful about where you take your money from and what agendas it comes with, as well as being seen as a neutral and respected organisation in a particular context. We all work quite hard to do that and to protect our organisations, which is why this issue of violent extremism has a whole new level of risk for us in terms of the risk-management and the safety of not only our staff but also of the reputation of our organisation. Without that, you cannot do anything.

Chair

Unless you are in the CIA.

Rebecca Crozier

Unless you are in the CIA and you have all the resources at your disposal.

Chair

Abou, how does Search for Common Ground deal with that trust issue?

Abou Fassi-Fihri

Thank you for the question. It is a very important one. A lot of what Rebecca says is valid for us too. We tend to be locally rooted and have long-term engagements of over a decade in some places. We started working in Burundi in 1995 and we still have a programme there that is still bringing tangible added value. We work with local staff in many of our country programmes. Over 90% of our staff come from the country where they work. In some places, it is 100%, such as in Yemen. That is very important because our teams know best in terms of local relationships and context. Taking the time to do the assessments before engaging is also key. That is where you develop many of the relationships.

I think the international side has its pros and cons. Of course, it may raise suspicions such as, 'Well, it comes from outside', but it also brings a lot of recognition of international expertise for an organisation like us working in 35 countries. There is a track record that people can see, and it is online on our website. People then speak about our work, and that is the best testimony that you can have: when people are pleased, advocate for our work and serve as our champions.

I would say something that is probably shared by everyone here: peacebuilding and engaging in dialogue and inclusion are very appealing. People are curious about inclusion and about going to the “other”. People do engage in peace work because it has such a positive message. Of course, we are impartial and are facilitators of processes. We would never dictate the outcome of a process; we are experts in the process, so we are the facilitators and the mediators. People know that we will not intervene and that we are here to convene stakeholders as impartially and neutrally as possible. This is another way in which to build trust.

Chair

Welcome to Lord Purvis. We were just talking about trust and how organisations gain local trust. I guess word of mouth is a really important thing as well as at least being seen to be as independent as is possible, and not being seen to have an ulterior motive but to have an end in yourselves, as it were, other than to be there to help the situation. Andras, do you think that there is advice that you could give to other organisations coming into the area that wanted to build that trust and to get involved?

Andras Beszterczey

The issue of staff is crucial and ensuring that the majority of your staff are from the country and in positions of senior leadership, so that, when they use their previous personal relationships, they can say, ‘I know this organisation. I am working for them. I am a decision-maker in this organisation. I am not being sent here to talk to you and use my social capital for the organisation’s ends.’ That is vital. Also, in terms of the idea of confidentiality, many of these communities recognise that the majority of NGO funding internationally comes from western governments who they might be opposed to in terms of foreign policy, so they have to know that you are clear about confidentiality and that, when they tell you something, it is not going to make its way back to CIA or MI6, or all the other rumours that are rife in these situations around what we do.

Finally, starting practical is an important advantage of broad mandate organisations. We can start our work on humanitarian issues, which is much less politically sensitive, so you can build up to working on peacebuilding issues. We have this now in Iraq, in places that have been liberated from ISIS. We have started the humanitarian work, so that, by the time the peacebuilding work comes, we already have these relationships and we know that we have been working with these communities for a period of time.

Baroness Suttie

I have one last question before I have to leave you. Andras, you referred in your introduction to mistakes in programming. You mentioned programmes that raise expectations and then cannot deliver. What would be the advice from all four of you to organisations on the ground in terms of trying to overcome raising expectations and then not delivering, given that you have identified that as a possible factor in increasing radicalisation?

Andras Beszterczey

It is about really understanding where you can have a realistic impact. Doing a poorly planned livelihoods programme somewhere, just so that you can say that you have reached 1,000 beneficiaries that you have agreed with the donor, is going to cause more harm than good in the long term. It is about being honest about the situation and not implementing the programme, giving the money back, or saying that you need more time or that you need some money to do some market research. The way that the programme is structured currently may just end up training 50 mechanics and 50 hairdressers, of whom 5% will get a job and 95% will be very angry at the

end. It is about being realistic. This is the zero-sum competition in which NGOs often play against each other. If we say, 'We, as Mercy Corps, are not going to take this money because we think it is going to do more harm than good', another organisation will. That is a big problem within the NGO sector as a whole.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

When we work on a youth-leadership programme, for example, we want to really inspire and send a message that the sky is the limit. That is how it should be. There is a lot of dynamism and a lot of ideas among youth. We should not put a ceiling on youth aspirations when they engage in such leadership programmes. On the other hand, we need to set expectations around what is feasible and how to achieve that. That is part of the training that we can offer.

One example is youth who are engaged in local advocacy around youth priorities in their community. Advocacy training includes how we can make legislation or change laws, and understanding the appropriate level of competency in terms of the difference between a municipality and the parliament so as to understand all those dynamics. We can set expectations there during the capacity building workshops, so that our partners and the youth who engage in those programmes know what they can achieve, how they can achieve it, and what they cannot achieve in terms of their advocacy. It is just a matter of transparency about resources available, timeframe for our support, etc.

Many of our projects have a time limit of two years. It is not a 10-year engagement in a particular framework. It is also about understanding that we need to work on both the demand and the supply side of governance. For example, we cannot invest extensively in civil society's skills and its approach to participating in local affairs without also engaging with local authorities who should be prepared to address that demand, so that they can meet in the middle. There are many approaches, but engaging both the demand and supply side of governance is a very important point; otherwise, we will all fail.

Rebecca Crozier

Start small and aim to make a systemic change. For example, in terms of the participatory budgeting stuff in Tunis that I was talking about, International Alert is not going to roll that out across every municipality in Tunisia. If we can get that one municipality to take it on as a regular process, they do not need us to support that forever. Even better, if we can get the Minister of Interior to recognise it as a positive idea, they could direct local authorities to do it. It is not rocket science and it is not expensive.

The other thing to say would be that, working with partners and with organisations in terms of building resilience or countering violent extremism, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. There are a lot of organisations that are already doing this; they are just not calling it that. There are organisations that are providing livelihoods programming in ISIS-held areas of Syria. They are there and they are doing stuff. We need to understand who those local organisations are, which takes effort because you are going down to quite a micro level, and to help them to measure the impact of their work in terms of building resilience and to do it better and more at-scale. You do not necessarily need to come in with a brand-new programme, particularly as an international organisation, but you can identify those who are doing good work already and help them to do more of it. Therefore, if, tomorrow, the UK government decides, 'We cannot be bothered to fund this anymore' or 'It is not a priority', or your donor drops out, that work is still happening on the ground. It is really important that we do not reinvent the wheel.

Emphasising the role of the British Council here is really important, because they have really significant outreach. They can potentially identify a broad base of organisations that are doing good work on resilience. The work that we do with the British Council in Syria and with Search for Common Ground too is supporting existing youth leadership: identifying local youth leaders and helping them to have more of a voice and more of a say both in their locality and at more of a regional and national level. It is not about creating new leaders but identifying existing ones and helping them to play more of a role.

Connecting with what the academics were saying last week about leadership, we would agree that that this is important. They were talking about bringing people over for Chevening scholarships etc, but that is a very elite level of leadership and there are layers and layers of leadership that we need to support too, so that there is a real potential there at the local level. The British Council is already doing that and could definitely do more of it.

Lord Purvis

Following on directly from that point, have you ever been part of any mapping or auditing exercise by a government agency in terms of trying to map or audit the number of projects that are being carried out on a country basis?

Rebecca Crozier

Not really, unless I have not remembered something. Often, when you are asking for money from a government, they will ask you to go and map who else is working in the sector, so that you acknowledge that you are coordinating with others and that you know who else is there. Often, my perspective is that, from very recent conversations that I have had with the UK government on Syria, it seems that they perhaps do not have the capacity to do that wide-scale mapping, so there is not really one. With Syria, for example, there are the humanitarian-agency responses, so there are clusters like the health sector, the education sector and the protection sector, who map who is working through the UNHCR, but not necessarily by a government.

Andras Beszterczey

Even that UN mapping is normally quite incomplete. In terms of the way in which it is structured for the Syria response in Lebanon, at least, the international organisations are initially part of that. Theoretically, they are then responsible for also connecting up their local partner organisations to encompass all of the responders, for example, in the peacebuilding sphere in Lebanon. That, however, is always a changing dynamic in terms of who is directly coordinating in these clusters. I guess the short answer to that question, from my perspective, is 'no'.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

The definition is very important for the mapping. If you want to map "CVE-specific" projects, it is a different definition than "CVE-relevant" projects, which is a much wider definition. If we map "CVE-relevant" projects, we include the long-term education and job-creation projects that can tackle the drivers and root causes of radicalisation. The efforts that we have seen taking place to map local and international organisations that are "specifically" tackling violent extremism can also be linked to the process of developing national government strategies to address violent extremism. Jordan is now engaging in this effort, which creates a great opportunity to be participatory and to engage civil society in the design of the national strategy and also to do that mapping of initiatives.

Miranda Hurst

I totally agree with everyone else. It would be a really good exercise to make recommendations for the kinds of initiatives which you could scale up, but the issue of definition is going to be there from the outset. I am not sure if you have seen the triangle where PVE is at the bottom and then CVE. If you are going to take everything at the bottom slice, then it is everything. Mapping what exists and what could be further supported, as Rebecca was suggesting, is a great idea.

Lord Purvis

During the time I have been on this inquiry, I have also spoken at events on transparency around aid. DFID, the Swedish government and others are making real inroads into online publications of all country programmes. We could go on that now and find out what DFID programmes are being operated on a country-by-country basis with other donor communities, but there does not seem to be the equivalent in this field. Either there is duplication or there is a lack of acknowledgment or recognition of existing permanent programmes on top, but that may be something for us to consider.

Andras Beszterczey

On that point, oftentimes there is also an agreement between the donor and the implementing agency that, while the programme might be preventing violent extremism, they will not be publicly talking about the programme as such, because you do not want to expose yourself intelligence agencies. If you say, 'This is a PVE programme', it is a big deal, so you would normally mask in a community-development, youth-education or some other less politically-sensitive veneer.

Lord Purvis

On the trust element – and forgive me if this has been covered while I was out of the room – when you know that there are externally-funded programmes that have a shelf life that will be coming to an end, do you all automatically put in exit approaches for those projects or programmes? Presumably, for some of the individuals who you are working with on some programmes, that trust will be actively undermined for future programmes if there is quite an abrupt end to a relationship on which trust has been built. Is that a common factor or is that not really relevant? Could you understand any of that? I was wondering whether or not trust is undermined when programmes come to an end, if the recipients of the programme do not understand why it has necessarily come to an end, and whether organisations routinely now have an exit approach for a programme, whereby they know how it is going to end and how they manage that with the people who they use.

Rebecca Crozier

The way that we work – and I think most organisations should be similar – is that your exit strategy should be built into the design of the programme from the beginning, such that, as an international organisation, you are quite conscious that that programme is not dependent on you remaining as its main implementer either financially or in terms of expertise. The whole aim of the programme is for someone else to take it on, whether that is a local authority – if they exist – or the local partner organisations that are implementing it. A lot of the work that we do in many countries, particularly post the Arab Spring, where civil society is quite nascent, is building the capacity of civil-society organisations to channel funding themselves, so that they do not need NGOs as a conduit.

My answer to that partly, then, is that we do, but it is in the design. Different organisations often work differently, but a lot of peacebuilding organisations are similar in that we are quite dependent on donor-government funding. It depends which government that is, and you are at the whim of

political change. That is particularly a key issue for this issue because it is very political. What is funded on the ground in Syria or Tunisia, for example, is quite linked to the domestic political agenda of the particular government.

The UK government funds work in Syria, generally because ISIS and al-Nusra are seen as a threat to the UK, so it is very tied in with an agenda. If that agenda shifts and changes, the funding becomes at risk, or you are working with funding from a government that then becomes an active player in that conflict – for example, through airstrikes – which changes things not so much in financial terms but in terms of how you are perceived working on the ground and the risks of being seen as aligned with that particular government.

In everything that we do, we try to build in exit strategies; otherwise, it is a complete disaster. What is specific to this area, however, is the political nature of it and the connectedness of domestic and foreign agendas.

Chair

Following on from that, is there a high degree of collaboration between organisations like yours. Are you sharing programmes and passing one to another? Are you using best practice from each? Is it silo stuff? Are people working together?

Andras Beszterczey

Because of its sensitive nature, violent-extremism programmes are probably the most siloed of all. All of our organisations have relationships bilaterally in countries where I have worked. Sometimes, the donor also facilitates these.

It is easier to work with other organisations in less politically sensitive topics, and violent-extremism programmes are at the top of that hierarchy. In peacebuilding programmes, it is much more common, when you are working in similar areas, to coordinate; for example, if there is the same religious leader who is quite supportive of a programme or, especially working with local government, if you can get a real, tangible impact in terms of including youth from one municipality in local-government decision-making processes and then using that as a model to show, for example, other local governments how this works.

We are good at that in terms of sharing lessons and findings. The fact that a lot of our research findings are also corroborating those of others, and that the political-violence field has learned over the last decade, is testament to a fair amount of lesson-sharing that goes on.

About Fassi-Fihri

I agree with that. In many ways, we are sister organisations. Especially in the field, we collaborate and coordinate a lot, so we all know the leadership and staff of our respective organisations. I would say that coordination mechanisms do exist, depending on the country context. In many places, they do exist. It is broader than this group of organisations represented here, and there are many others, and we do a lot of coordination. Sometimes, that coordination is led by a government agency, when appropriate. At other times, it is just among civil society ourselves. Many times, coordination also includes donor agencies and embassies in the country. A positive trend is working more in a consortium, together on the same program or initiative.

The example here is with the British Council, International Alert and Search for Common Ground. We go to another level of synergy and impact. We also build on each other's expertise. Some organisations may focus more on research, others may focus on advocacy at the policy level, and

others may do more of the grassroots work on prevention, all within the same programme. This can be very strong and solid.

Miranda Hurst

At the UK level we very much talk to each other, sharing intel and coming up with joint issues that we want to work on.

Chair

Abou, you say that one of your goals is to end violent conflict through conflict transformation. While that is a laudable, fabulous thing, how can you establish your relative level of success in achieving that? How do you quantify or qualify your success – or failures, if there are any?

Abou Fassi-Fihri

Thank you for the question – the goal is very ambitious in terms of transforming the way the world deals with conflict. It cannot be more ambitious than that. Working on violence reduction or ending violence is also very difficult. How can you be sure that, if violence stops, that is thanks to your contribution, while there are so many other external and often international factors as well? That is why every design has to be very specific. We need to know exactly what our entry point and end goal is for each initiative. We have invested a lot in design, monitoring and evaluation (DME), which is very important to us as peacebuilders, to know that we are doing good work. It is important for our partners and beneficiaries – that is our responsibility to them – and for our donors and for the peacebuilding field.

Compared to humanitarian or development aid, peacebuilding is still, in many ways, a small and growing field of intervention, so we know that we need to demonstrate success. We are very solid in systematically measuring the before and the after (pre – post) of any intervention, measuring the changes in attitudes, skills and behaviours through baseline, systematic monitoring and external evaluation. Our organisation publishes all our evaluations online, which is very important in helping the field. Monitoring and evaluation in peacebuilding is a growing field. I recommend that people consult the DME4Peace website for more information.

Rebecca Crozier

Adding to that, our organisation is similar in terms of mandate and it is a really good question. There is a question of scale here; for example, we work on a huge project worth tens of millions of pounds in Nigeria with the British Council. It is a large-scale governance programme and we work to build trust between local communities and security forces, so that they work together and collaborate. Measuring that, we know that the incidence of violence in communities where there is increased collaboration is going down. That is one thing, but that is a huge project.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is the work that I explained in Tunis, where we know that individuals are changing as a result and that we are changing the structure of the way a society works by potentially improving the state/citizen relationship, which could have a huge impact. That, however, is a small project worth £100,000 a year. Part of it here is that there is not a huge amount of monetary investment in the peacebuilding sector. We are all relatively small organisations – or the peacebuilding sectors of our organisations are small – compared to the money spent on humanitarian aid or defence or security-based approaches.

Our argument would be that, while we have a small impact, we could have a bigger one with more investment, because we would get economies of scale.

Chair

Small but perfectly formed. Andras, is evaluation also an issue at Mercy Corps?

Andras Beszterczey

To win any bid from any donor – and I think the UK is more stringent than the others – you have to say exactly what your programme is going to reach. I guess it depends on the type of the programme. If you are looking at a youth and violent-extremism programme, you might want to measure youth's views on violence and whether or not it is justified. To measure a broader peacebuilding programme between two communities, you might measure the number of social interactions that people undertake voluntarily between the two communities, to show that there is a better relationship, or you might measure people's perceptions on safety: do people move around between 22.00 and midnight between communities?

If that was one of the goals of our programme and, two years later, there was more movement in these target communities, you could then attribute that to the programme, because we also always include control groups. You would do the same survey in a similar community that you do not work in, so that you are more able to say that your impact in the place where you did work is because of your programme, given that, in a very similar location where there was not this programme, security or perceptions or interactions have not changed.

Lord Purvis

Leading on from that, rather than your organisations doing project DME, is there a consistent way for the contributing community or the international community to define what good outcomes for PVE are? Is there a consistency of how they define language or what the outcomes may be? Some of what you have outlined you will put in your application yourself, because it will just be a headline where your expertise come in. You will design that programme but is there a consistency among EU countries or among UN countries? You are shaking your head, Miranda.

Miranda Hurst

Is it just me shaking my head?

Rebecca Crozier

It is a really good question and it gets to quite an important point, which is that there is no consistency. What we feel is an impact or is countering or preventing violent extremism may not be what somebody else feels. In particular, we feel it between those of us who are working on the ground with people – NGOs – and government entities. Someone sat in DFID has to report to a politician, who has to report to the taxpayer, and there is that whole level of accountability there. If we say that what we have done on the ground has changed people's attitudes and has enabled them to resolve conflicts non-violently and to see a different way of resolving conflicts, it is different to measure the hard numbers of how many people did not go to ISIS as a result of the intervention. That is the struggle: that we do not have those agreed. What does PVE mean in a particular context? We have an agreement about what it means but I think there is a disconnect sometimes. Does that make sense?

Lord Purvis

It does. Is it possible to do it? I asked whether it exists when I should have probably asked whether it is possible to do it. In our last session, we had some quite strong academic submissions. Without paraphrasing them, I picked up that it was almost impossible to have a really robust set of

definitions. If that is difficult, defining what the outcomes may well be for effective intervention is going to be quite hard in itself.

Andras Beszterczey

If I looked at our three organisations' indicators at different levels of the logical framework, which is how we structure our programmes, there would be quite a lot of commonality. Between NGOs, then, we definitely could. One of the issues that we have with donors is that they will perceive a programme very differently. They may want us, for example, to demonstrate that people's perceptions of ISIS have decreased in their community, and our reply could be, 'You cannot go into this community and ask people about ISIS', because it may put our staff at risk or the community at risk. They probably will not even answer the question truthfully anyway because, if an international organisation comes to you and asks you what you think about ISIS, even if you support them you are probably going to say that you do not, just because of the context.

We might, then, recommend different indicators; for example, it is much better to ask about people's perception of the use of violence and whether they think it is justified. The programme should be addressing that rather than people's perceptions of ISIS.

We can definitely start a conversation that way and most people would be open to it. I cannot say yes or no, but there are very different ways of looking at these programmes. Maybe the donor in country will see it very differently to the donor in the capital, who will see it very differently to the MP who is ultimately responsible to the taxpayer. It would be difficult, but there would be quite a lot of commonality between our three organisations.

Rebecca Crozier

I would say that it is not impossible and that it is really worthwhile, even if you just started with the UK government in terms of coming to an understanding – and I do not know whether they have it already, but even then you have to coordinate across a lot of different agencies within the government – of what indicators of success are on this.

Miranda Hurst

I would add that, although we are using a lot of our old tools, the way in which we package them is slightly different now. We have done a lot of research in the last few years about drivers, and we feel fairly confident that we understand that piece which was previously not so clear. Now we are rigorously testing programme impact and we are working on that question. I would say that there is optimism that we are getting closer to being able to give you something which is a little more concrete, but it is still in the works. It is very much on our minds that we need to be able to show impact, so it is not something that we are forgetting about as an agenda point. Certainly, as a result of improved research, our programmes have improved, and we are now measuring impact of those programmes, so it is not that far away.

Lord Purvis

As it stands at the moment, however, there is not the equivalent for PVE that there would be for, say, some of the global development goals, where they are quite clearly associated with funding streams and with outcomes being proposed in that.

Miranda Hurst

No, and what I flagged earlier is a concern with the national action plans requested under the UN Secretary-General's new approach. Those will probably have clear indicators. The government of

Jordan might have been the first to have announced its plan, but I might be wrong. We would look at what those are and hope that we could influence and look at how they are being measured, because we have some concerns perhaps about how that money is being spent. That is what you are going to see, in the next few years, is those national action plans.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

I would like to mention the work of the UNSC on Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security, which is a new resolution from December 2015. As you may know, the UN Secretary-General commissioned research due at the end of 2017 to look at the operationalisation of this resolution. It has a set of indicators. It is a very interesting exercise through case studies in Tunisia, for example, in our region. Of course, 2250 includes a PVE dimension through the role of youth in matters of peace and security, so I see it as a very interesting avenue to look at indicators. It is at the UN, global level, so there is an alignment with the experts on that. I would look at that as a very interesting initiative.

Chair

The final topic is about how to increase the impact and scale of your work. I guess the big question here is: what are the gaps that you think need to be filled? What more can be done? What are your recommendations? I know that some of you did discuss some recommendations in your opening talk but I wonder if I could ask each of you to come out with some thoughts about recommendations more generally?

Rebecca Crozier

We may have said quite a lot of it already. The first thing is increasing the evidence base for what works on this: ensuring that we invest properly and measuring what is working. Hand in hand with that, we know that some of the work that we have presented today works in terms of addressing violence. We think that that should be given greater priority in terms of the funding for it vis-à-vis more security-focused approaches. If you did some analysis on violent extremism and how much money was spent on supporting increased security and intelligence etc versus how much was spent on the more preventative side, working with communities on addressing some of the drivers, you would see a massive disparity. I do not know if anyone has done the sums. The long term needs more support.

Also, sometimes the focus is on security and stability, which is not necessarily peace. Our short-term security is bought at the expense of long-term peace and stability, when you prioritise security-focused approaches over long-term working with communities to change attitudes and behaviours and to work on the drivers.

Those would be my main things, as well as the identification of who is already doing work on the ground that can be scaled up – not just big organisations like the ones sat here but also the very local-level organisations. You might have to partner with 20 of them to have any kind of scale of work, but it is worth it because what they do on the ground and the level of trust that they have means that they can get so much further, so much more quickly, than anyone new coming in to a particular context. Those are the main things.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

Definitely, I think we should engage and support more people on the ground to do this work – all the volunteers and organisations that are already doing the work of prevention – because it does affect the communities very directly. We should support more people to do this work, as well as

the diversity of people in terms of women, youth, religious leaders and families, who have a very important role in the prevention of radicalisation. Any intervention and research has to be very localised. As I have said before, it is very important. That also means that we may be more strategic in where we want to invest, because it is hard to engage in every community, but building those vetted methodologies can really help scaling up, by us and others, once these are properly tested.

I see supporting national CVE/PVE strategies and ensuring that they are inclusive and participatory with civil society as a very important point in many countries in the region. Jordan and Tunisia are examples, as is Morocco and Lebanon. It is very important that CVE/PVE national action plans are as inclusive as possible.

Andras Beszterczey

On the idea of prevention, we have to recognise violent extremism's place. There has been a lot of focus on it recently, but violent extremism is a very small part of broader political violence going on around the world. All of our research shows that violent conflict creates violent extremism much more than violent extremism creates violent conflict, so I think we have to focus on broader political violence. That will help us to get ahead of the violent-extremism problem.

Second, there should be much more effective collaboration between NGOs, donors and the UN. In terms of a lot of these problems around violent extremism, we cannot handle them on our own. For example, if we look at Jordanians joining ISIS, there are grievances around their marginalisation. For that, you have to work with the communities – our kind of work – to make sure that youth have an investment in their communities, and you also have to have diplomatic pressure on the Jordanian government to implement meaningful reforms that would allow people greater ability to impact their lives.

Elections are taking place later this month and, when I was there a few days ago, it seemed like very few people were going to vote. In order to tackle these problems and the marginalisation that youth face around the world, you need much better partnerships between organisations working at the diplomatic level and NGOs working at the community level.

To echo what Rebecca said, there is still a lot of scope for us to improve our research. One of the key areas where we are trying to understand more is social networks. It is social networks, not social media, that convince people to join these organisations, and it is also social networks that convince them not to go or get them back. In Jordan, we found that mothers are the most effective in dissuading their sons from joining ISIS or making sure that they come back. There is a lot of scope for research to really understand these social networks, because they have positive and negative aspects that contribute to violent extremism, and we do not really yet understand which one works when and how we can support the positive.

Lord Purvis

Would you say that there is an optimum size of a programme, or an optimum scale for what it should reach? There will be a huge variation. Rebecca mentioned Chevening scholars earlier, which may well be extremely important in the long term but it will affect a tiny minority, or they may be some that affect much more of a wider conflict-afflicted area. Is there an optimum size?

Rebecca Crozier

Do you mean in terms of numbers of people?

Lord Purvis

Numbers of people or the budget that is associated with that. In your experience, are there programmes that, if they are structured because of the size and scale, are not effective?

Andras Beszterczey

I would say less in terms of size or budget. The main issue that sometimes limits the impact of peacebuilding programmes in general and PVE programmes specifically is duration. Often, our programmes are for one or two years. I have never seen a three-year programme, although I am sure that they are out there. These are very short, especially to build relationships.

Second, we often see a cap on staffing. From the donor's perspective, your budget is divided into human resources and the amount of people that you have, with the rest of it going into programme activities etc. Often, donors want to have you spending less on staff and more on the programme activities. That is a mistake, especially in the peacebuilding sphere, because we are often left with having too few staff to build those relationships that the programme really needs to succeed, whether that is in terms of identifying youth or building relationships with community and religious leaders or local government.

Those two are the things that are much more important than just making sure that you have another £1 million to spend. If you have another £1 million to spend without the duration or the staff to spend in an intelligent way, you will just be spending on community infrastructure, where you will say, 'We need to spend the money by 31 March. Let us buy the local municipality a rubbish truck.'

Rebecca Crozier

I would agree that it is the duration. It goes back to what I said before about trust-building taking so much time. It is harder to justify or to explain to a taxpayer, for example, why that costs so much money. It does because it is so labour-intensive.

Abou Fassi-Fihri

In terms of the optimum, I believe that we should seek programmes that seek to institutionalise what we are doing. If we invest in peace education in schools, for instance, we would want it to be institutionalised at a national level. Like we do in Yemen with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, we helped create a curriculum of violence reduction and peace education that is provided to schools across the country. That sort of programme has the right level of investment. It is not long-term, yet the scale and the impact will be large. We are trying to seek that kind of balance in programmes that aim for those results and return on investment.

Interlinking and integrating large media programmes to complement whatever is done in communities is another approach to explore to not only focus on a couple of communities on the ground but also to be able to convey those positive messages through television, radio and social media to the whole population and territory. The best programmes, in my opinion, are those that can work on the ground in communities, where there is an institutionalisation component, and where there is a also media component to amplify the message.

Lord Purvis

In your experience, does the UK do things differently from other countries as far as what we have been discussing in terms of how programmes are put together, the funding structures and the definitions? How do we compare with our European neighbours or other members of the G7?

Rebecca Crozier

I think it is more thorough. I do not know what others think but, with the UK, the people who we engage with have a lot more knowledge and expertise within a department like DFID, for example, than if you are dealing with a country that has perhaps a smaller foreign ministry, where the people are diplomats, not experts in aid. Therefore, there is a bigger focus, as Andras said earlier, on indicators and results, and a tighter design process and more layers that you go through.

In other cases, it might be slightly more political. For example, the research for the work that we did in Tunis was funded by the UK. We had a lot of meetings with, for example, the counter-terrorism advisory section, so we were quite clear that the funding was not only to get information in order to design a good programme in Tunis to help Tunisians but also in order to have an information flow back to the UK. With other donors, there is more of a disconnect between what is funded on the ground and domestic security agendas. From our perspective, that is how it looks.

Miranda Hurst

I would say it depends on who you are comparing yourself with. The UK government spending 50% on fragile and conflict-affected states is unusual compared to other governments. There is already more interest in looking at the places where we are doing CVE projects. DFID is well-known for its transparency, so that is another strong point. With more funding such as the Conflict, Security and Stabilisation Fund is getting, there is a shift to cross-government programmes, which would be more akin to a US model, so it might change a little in terms of how it has been versus what we might be moving towards.

Within that, if you compare us to the US system, where there is a huge counterterrorism regime compared with what we have, we have a slightly different setup currently. But with a shift towards more money being spent by these cross-government funding pools, the securitisation of some of these programme funds might increase. It is something for us to watch.

Chair

Can I just say how immensely valuable your contributions have been to what we are trying to do and how fascinating it has been? I have learned a great deal and you have added immeasurably to what we are doing. We are very grateful to you for coming. Thank you very much indeed.

This Full Transcript was produced by Ubiquis UK ☎ +44 (0) 20 7269 0370

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